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THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE

THE STORY OF ELIJAH

BEAUTIFUL STORIES SERIES

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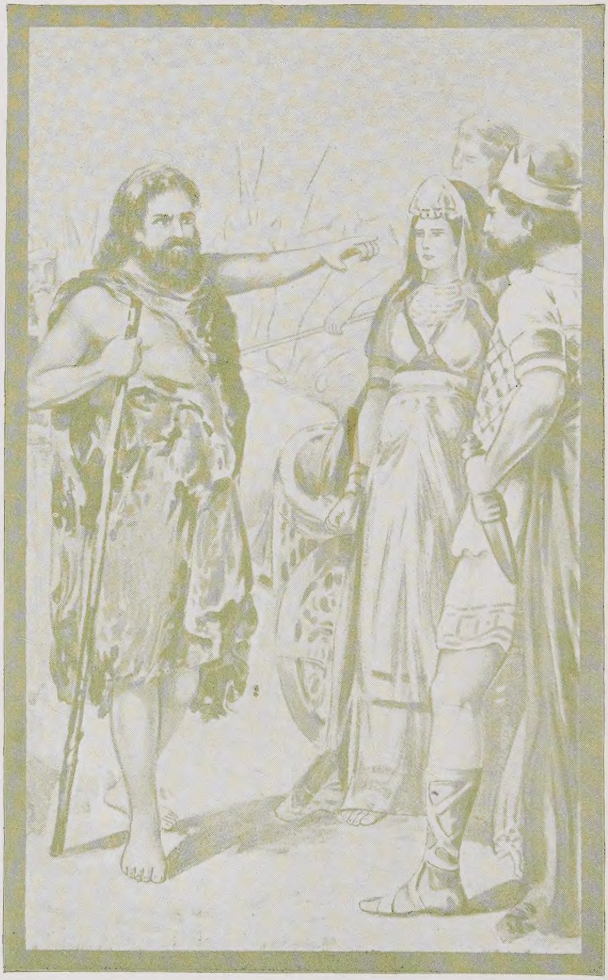
THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE



ALTEMUS'
BEAUTIFUL STORIES SERIES

THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE

THE STORY OF ELIJAH

BY

J. H. WILLARD

ILLUSTRATED

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HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE

AFTER the death of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam became ruler of the Israelites. The prodigality and magnificence of Solomon's court, and his lavish way of living, had been met by heavy taxation. Seeing the vast revenues of the kingdom employed in this way, the people had grown discontented.

After Rehoboam had become king, the Israelites appealed to him to lighten the taxes and other heavy burdens which oppressed the poor. Instead of following the advice of his older counsellors, and releasing the people from some of their burdens, the new king hearkened to the counsel of the younger men who had grown up with him and scornfully rejected the petition of his subjects.

A very ambitious man named Jeroboam

presented the petition to Rehoboam, and upon its rejection, ten tribes revolted and made Jeroboam their ruler under the title of King of Israel.

The remainder of the Israelitish nation from this time were known as the Kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem remained its capital, and God was worshipped in the magnificent temple built by King Solomon. It also maintained the regular priesthood, its officers descending as formerly from father to son.

Among the twenty sovereigns of Judah, there were a few who served God sincerely. The best four of the kings were Asa, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah. Asa fought against the worship of idols which had corrupted the people, yet he made an alliance with the King of Syria, who was an idolater. Jehosaphat, his son, ruled the kingdom of Judah for twenty-five years, and, although he did not always do right, his reign was a quiet one.

THE KING SCORNFULLY REJECTED THEIR PETITION

Hezekiah waged a vigorous war against the worship of idols, and, as far as he was able, restored the worship of God in the temple. The Bible says of everything he undertook for the glory of God that *"he did it with all his heart, and prospered."*

Hezekiah was a very brave man, and when Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, sent an army against Jerusalem, his speech to the people, telling them to be strong and courageous, for God would help them and fight for them, was not unlike that of Joshua when he exhorted the Israelites to trust in God, at the time when they were about to enter the land of Canaan.

The prophet Isaiah lived during the reign of Hezekiah. At one time when the king was very sick he prayed to God that his life might be spared. God told Isaiah to tell him that He had heard his prayer, and that He would heal him, and prolong his life for fifteen years.

When Isaiah had delivered God's message,

HEZEKIAH DESTROYED THE IDOLS IN THE TEMPLE

Hezekiah asked for a sign that these things should be done, and Isaiah said that he might decide whether the shadow upon the sundial should go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees.

Hezekiah replied that it was an easy thing for the shadow to go forward ten degrees, and asked that it might go backwards. God moved the shadow as the king had asked, and he accepted it as a sign that his life was to be spared and his days lengthened.

Josiah was only eight years old when he came to the throne of Judah. He served God while yet a child, and devoted his life to His service. He reigned for more than thirty years, and was killed at last by an arrow while defending his kingdom against Necho, King of Egypt.

In spite of the repeated warnings of God's prophets, the people continued to worship idols, until as a punishment the kingdom was entirely broken up. After a siege lasting six-

GOD MOVED THE SHADOW BACKWARDS

teen months, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, took the city of Jerusalem, burned the Temple, and carried away as prisoners all the inhabitants who had survived the horrors of the siege. This was the end of the Kingdom of Judah, and the beginning of the period known as "the captivity."

For some time after the separation of Israel from Judah, there was war between the two kingdoms, but later they formed an alliance to prevent the King of Syria from encroaching upon them. Still later the old enmity broke out again. There were nineteen Kings of Israel in all, and city after city became the capital of the kingdom, until in the time of its sixth king Samaria became the seat of government.

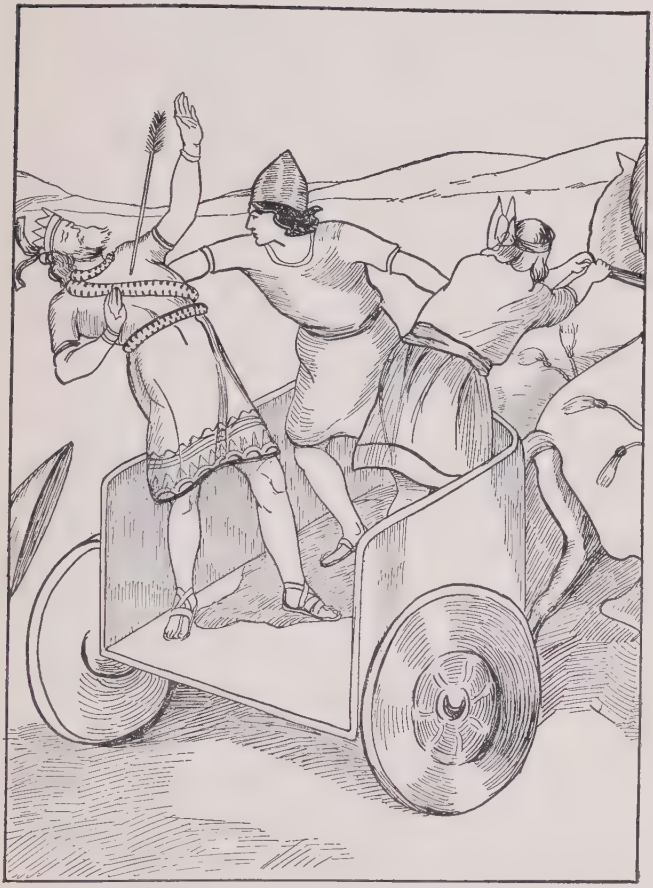
Omri was the King who built Samaria. The monarchs who preceded him were conspicuous for evil doing, but Omri exceeded them in wickedness. The reign of his son Ahab was still worse, and of this King of Israel the Bible

JOSIAH WAS ONLY EIGHT YEARS OLD

says, *"Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the Kings of Israel that were before him."*

Ahab married Jezebel, a Phœnician princess, and this was the crowning point of his sinful career. Jezebel was unprincipled and intolerant, and as Ahab was a weak man, he became little more than a tool in her hands. She introduced at once the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, the male and female gods of her own country. She caused a great temple to be built on the brow of a hill, and there the worship of these idols was carried on. Four hundred and fifty priests and attendants administered the services of Baal, and four hundred those of Ashtaroth.

Not content with introducing this heathen worship, Jezebel persecuted the few among the nation who remained faithful to the worship of God. She caused their altars to be destroyed, and to save their lives they fled to the wildest solitudes, and hid in caves, as their



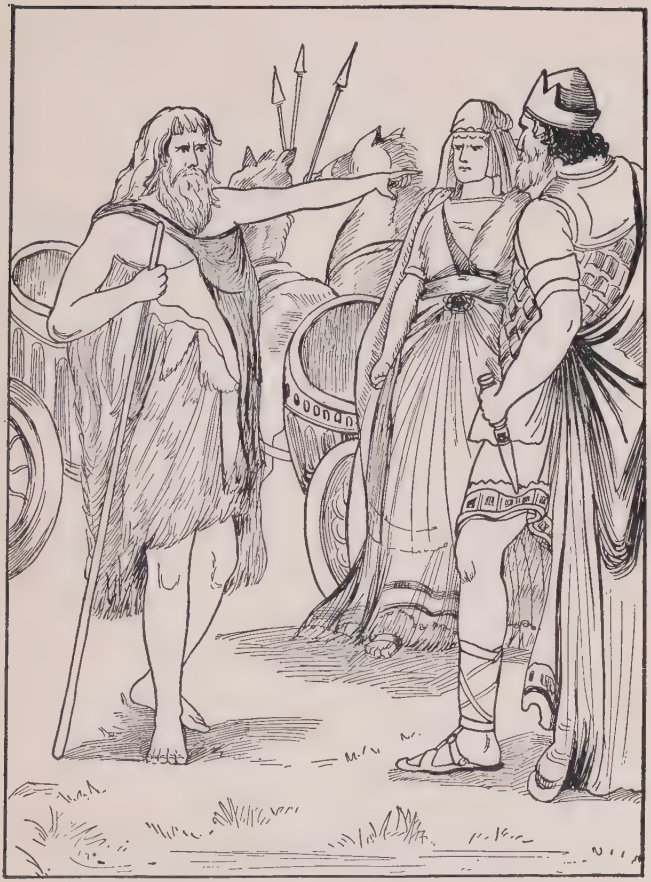
JOSIAH WAS KILLED BY AN ARROW

forefathers had done in the days of the Judges.

While all this was taking place, and while Ahab was occupying himself with the building of a splendid palace at Jezreel, a new and startling figure appeared upon the scene. None knew whence the mysterious stranger came, as, wrapped in a rough cape, or mantle, of sheepskin, he confronted the astonished king.

The name of this strange visitor was Elijah, a man of whom it has been said that he was "the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced." His long, thick hair indicated remarkable powers of endurance, and in addition to his sheepskin mantle he wore a girdle made from the skin of some animal, which in the fashion of the day he tightened when about to move quickly.

Elijah was one of God's prophets, and his mission was to announce to Ahab that a judgment was about to fall upon the land, because



THE NAME OF THIS STRANGE VISITOR WAS ELIJAH

the people had forsaken the worship of God, and bowed down to idols instead. This punishment was to be in the shape of a drought, at all times a terrible infliction, but especially so in Eastern countries where all vegetation quickly dries up when there is a scarcity of water.

Elijah's message was very brief, and before the king had recovered from his astonishment, the prophet had departed as abruptly as he had appeared.

We have no record that Elijah had any settled home. The wild paths of the wilderness and the mountains were familiar to him, and he dwelt where some spreading tree would afford him a leafy shelter. He moved from place to place, according to God's commands. Now, as he left the presence of Ahab, God's word came to him, directing him to turn to the eastward, and hide by the brook Cherith.

Elijah stayed in this retreat as long as the falling stream afforded water to quench his

ELIJAH WAS FED TWICE EACH DAY BY RAVENS

thirst, and during this time he was fed by ravens, who, twice each day, brought him bread and meat. After a while the brook dried up, and the leaves which had protected him from the fierce sun shriveled and fell to the ground, for the promised drought was upon the land.

Again the word of God came upon Elijah, telling him what road to take to his next shelter. Across the mountains of Lebanon, where the brooks were as dry as that of Cherith, the prophet made his way. Descending their further slopes, he crossed the plains at their feet, and with his face still towards the sea, approached the village or town of Zarephath. The modern village of Sura-flud is supposed to occupy its site, and the ruins of the ancient town are to be seen there.

Elijah was now in Phœnicia, the native country of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. It would seem to be the last place in which an enemy of Baal would seek refuge, but Elijah

THE SITE OF ZAREPHATH

knew that God had a purpose in sending him there. Ethbaal, the father of Jezebel, was the King of Phœnicia, and the famine which followed the drought had reached that country, and was causing terrible suffering.

Just outside Zarephath, Elijah found a woman gathering sticks for firewood. She was a widow, and in such poverty that all the food she had in the world was a handful of meal and a little oil in a bottle or jar. Consumed with thirst, Elijah asked her for water, and, as she turned to bring it, he asked her also for a piece of bread.

Sadly the woman told him she had no bread. She was gathering sticks to make a fire over which she would cook the handful of meal and the little oil remaining in the bottle. When she and her son had eaten this, they would have no more food, and in consequence would die of hunger.

It is probable that this woman was an Israelite, and not a worshipper of Baal, for,

A WOMAN GATHERING STICKS FOR FIREWOOD

when Elijah told her to mix the meal and oil into a cake and bake it for him, adding, *"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth,"* the woman did as she was told, evidently recognizing him as a prophet of God. She fed him before she and her son tasted of food, and gave him the shelter of her house as well; and during all the time of drought and famine, the supply of meal and oil never failed.

After a while, trouble came upon the little household. The widow's son suddenly became very sick and then died. The heart-broken mother demanded of Elijah why he had come to them only to slay her son. The prophet replied, *"Give me thy son,"* and taking the boy from his mother's arms, carried him into his own chamber and laid him on the bed.

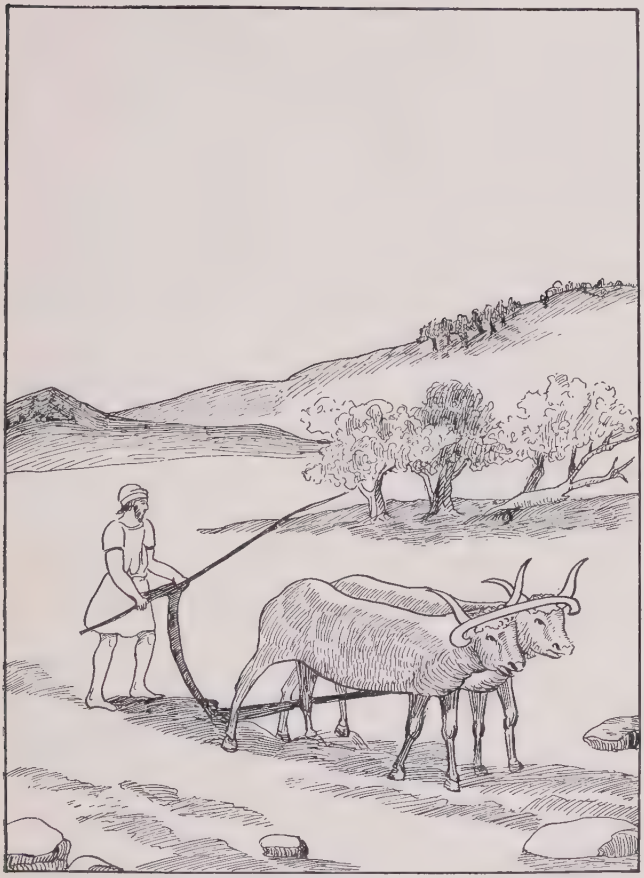
Then Elijah called upon God, and prayed that the child might be made alive again, and

ELIJAH CARRIED THE CHILD TO HIS MOTHER

God heard his prayer, for the boy sat up alive and well. Taking him in his arms, the prophet carried the child to his mother, who was so happy that she exclaimed, *"Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord is in thy mouth."*

The drought continued, and the horrors of famine caused by the failure of all crops, was felt in Samaria. Ahab was in despair. Everywhere horses and other animals were dying, for there was not the scantiest grass or herbage of any kind for them to eat, and everywhere the streams were dry.

The chief officer of Ahab's household was a man named Obadiah. He was a faithful servant of God, and during the bitter persecutions of Jezebel, had hidden an hundred persons who worshipped God, in a cave and fed them there. Ahab now took Obadiah, and set out on a desperate search for pasturage and water for the animals, the king going one way and his servant the other.

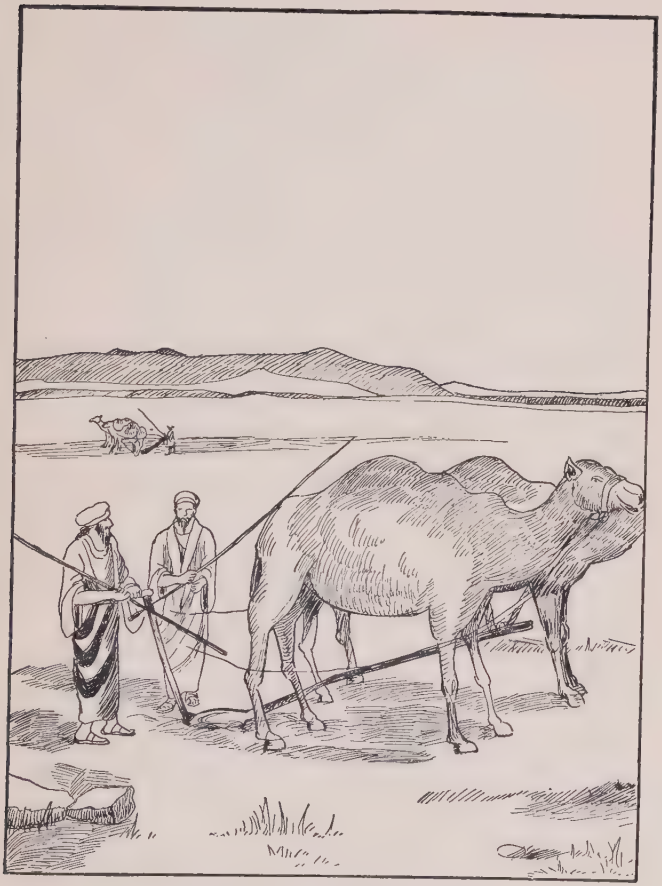


CULTIVATING THE LAND IN PALESTINE TODAY

Before Obadiah had gone very far, Elijah suddenly stood before him. Quickly the prophet told him to go to Ahab and tell him *"Elijah is here."* Obadiah feared that Elijah would disappear before he could bring the king to him, but, reassured by Elijah, he set forth to find Ahab.

Now Ahab had been searching throughout his kingdom for the mysterious stranger who had warned him of the coming drought, three years before; so, as soon as he learned from Obadiah that the stranger had reappeared, he went to meet him. When he saw the prophet, he asked him, *"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"* Elijah answered that *he* had not troubled Israel, but that Ahab's evil reign, and that of his father before him, had been the cause of the drought.

Then Elijah denounced the idolatry of Ahab, and followed this with a command to assemble his people on Mount Carmel, and bring also all the priests and attendants of



A FIELD IN PALESTINE TODAY

Baal and Ashtaroth. Ahab did not dare to disobey, and a great, weary, listless crowd assembled on the sun-burned slopes of the mountain. The priests were there in gorgeous vestments, and the king, himself, all eager and expectant. A spring of water, apparently undiscovered before, flowed not far away.

Elijah appeared with only one attendant, and soon his voice rang out. *"How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."*

The amazed people stood speechless. Then Elijah spoke again, saying he was but one prophet, while before him were four hundred and fifty of Baal's prophets. Then he proposed a test of powers.

He asked that two bullocks might be provided. The priests of Baal should take one, and prepare it for sacrifice by laying it on the wood upon the altar to their god, but they

ELIJAH'S SACRIFICE ON MOUNT CARMEL

were to put no fire under it. The other bullock he would prepare in the same way.

Then the priests of Baal were to call upon their god, and he would call upon his God, and the God that answered by sending fire to consume the sacrifice offered to him, was to be the God of the people. The answer of the people, dejected with long endurance of misery, was ready, and as one man they shouted, *"It is well spoken."*

The altar to Baal was prepared, with the sacrifice arranged upon it in proper form. Only fire was lacking. Loudly the priests of Baal prayed. Wildly they leaped around the altar, crying again and again, *"O Baal, hear us."* The morning wore away, and no fire appeared to consume the sacrifice.

About noon, Elijah mocked the frantic priests, saying to them, *"Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth; and must be awakened."*

A LITTLE CLOUD COMING OUT OF THE SEA

The priests of Baal accepted this advice in earnest. They supplicated and raved more wildly, and wounded themselves in their frenzy, continually calling on Baal to hear them. And so the afternoon passed.

As the sun was sinking, Elijah came near the altar which he had built with twelve stones —one for each of the tribes of Israel. The sacrifice, carefully prepared, lay upon the wood. All around the altar a trench had been dug, and it was now filled with the water which had been poured upon the sacrifice.

Then Elijah prayed to God, asking him to let the people know that day that He was the God of Israel, and that it was by His command that he had done these things. At the close of his prayer, fire unkindled by mortal hands broke out. Unchecked by the water, it wrapped sacrifice and altar in flames and consumed them, even licking up the water in the trench with its heated breath. At this sight the people prostrated themselves as they cried

ELIJAH WOKE TO FIND AN ANGEL BESIDE HIM

out, *"The Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is the God."*

The priests of Baal, who were largely responsible for the idolatry of the nation, stood trembling and confounded. Quickly Elijah ordered them to be destroyed, and this was done. Next he turned to Ahab, and told him to eat and drink in haste, for the long deferred rain was at hand, although no sign of its approach was in sight.

Attended only by his servant, Elijah then went to the top of Mount Carmel, and crouched upon the ground in the position of meditation commonly assumed in Eastern countries. He sent his servant to a spot which commanded a view of the Mediterranean Sea, bade him look around, and bring him word of what he saw.

Six times the servant returned with the word that he saw nothing. The seventh time his report was that he could see a little cloud, not larger than a man's hand, coming out of

ELISHA WAS PLOWING HIS FIELDS

the sea. Sending the man to warn Ahab that the rain was fast approaching, and that he must start at once for home, Elijah then hastened down the mountain to meet the king at its foot.

With all the speed he could command, Ahab barely reached his palace at Jezreel in time to escape the fury of the storm. Elijah ran before the royal chariot the entire distance of sixteen miles, but he did not enter the palace.

Thus far the triumph was with Elijah. The people were convinced, the priests of Baal were dead, the king was awe-struck. But Jezebel was relentless in her hatred of the prophet. So furious was she when Ahab told her what had been done that day, that she sent a message to Elijah, telling him that before another day had passed she would have his life. Prophet though he was, Elijah quailed before the threat of the idolatrous queen, and fled for his life.

Leaving his servant at Beer-sheba, Elijah

FALSE WITNESSES TESTIFIED AGAINST NABOTH

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went a day's journey into the wilderness, threw himself down under a solitary bush, and in a fit of despair, prayed that he might die. Worn out with excitement and fatigue, he fell asleep, but awoke to find food and water beside him, and an angel who told him to refresh himself with the provisions God had sent him.

Twice Elijah ate and drank of the miraculous food, and then in its strength traveled forty days and forty nights until he came to Mount Horeb, the place where Moses received the divine command to rescue the Israelites from Pharaoh.

Elijah found shelter in a cave, and there he heard the voice of God, asking, *"What doest thou here, Elijah?"* The answer of the prophet was one of bitterness and depression, but his complaints were cut short by a command to come out of the cave, and behold the wonderful works of God. Drawing his mantle about him, Elijah went out on the mountain side to watch.

ELIJAH STRUCK THE WATERS WITH HIS MANTLE

As he stood there, a mighty wind roared among the rocks and rent them to pieces. Then an earthquake shook the desert, until the mountain itself trembled under the shock. Then fire as mysterious as that which illuminated the bush in the days of Moses, played about the lonely heights. After a pause, *"a still, small voice"* whispered in the ear of the solitary watcher a revelation conveying comfort, and pointing out further duty. Strengthened and comforted, Elijah left the lonely mountain behind him, and shortly came across the man who was to cheer him as a companion, and succeed him as a prophet.

This man was Elisha, the son of Shaphat. He was ploughing the fields around his home with twelve yoke of oxen. As he passed him, Elijah cast his well-known mantle upon Elisha, who recognized in the action that from that time he was to be the attendant and friend of the prophet. Bidding his father and mother goodbye, Elisha followed Elijah, thus

THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL

beginning a long period of service and intercourse with him.

The disappearance of Elijah after his triumph over the priests of Baal, probably caused Ahab and Jezebel to believe that they had seen the last of the prophet. They certainly went on in their wicked ways, for soon we read that Ahab coveted the vineyard of a man named Naboth. This vineyard was quite near the walls of Ahab's palace, and he wished to turn it into a garden.

But Naboth would not sell his vineyard or exchange it for another, because it had belonged to his family for a very long time. His refusal made Ahab so angry and disappointed that he threw himself upon his bed, and refused to eat or even to speak. In this state Jezebel found him, and at once began to comfort him, telling him he should have his vineyard.

The first thing this wicked woman did was to bribe witnesses to say that Naboth had

ELIJAH WAS SWEPT UP INTO THE CHARIOT

spoken evil of God and also of the king. Naboth was condemned and stoned to death. Ahab then took possession of the vineyard, and as he was walking in it one day, he saw Elijah coming towards him. Tremblingly the wicked king exclaimed, *"Hast thou found me, O my enemy?"* Elijah replied that he had sought him, not because he was his enemy, but to tell him he was to be punished, because all his life he had done wrong.

Ahab was killed in battle three years afterwards, and later, Jezebel met with a terrible death, for she was thrown from a window by her own servants, and crushed to death on the stones below.

When the time came for Elijah's work on earth to cease, he took Elisha with him to a place called Gilgal. They crossed the River Jordan in a manner as wonderful as that of the passage of the Israelites into Canaan, many years before. Elijah struck the waters with his mantle and the waters parted, leav-

ing a pathway over which the two walked in safety.

There, while these two men of God were talking together, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared, and parted them. Elijah was swept up into the chariot, and was carried away into heaven. But before he disappeared, his mantle fell from him. Elisha took it up, and with it received the power of performing miracles which God had given to Elijah, the man who did not die.

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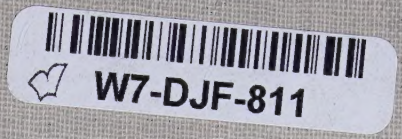
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